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### Picture Frames

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## Picture Frames

# Picture Frames<sup>1</sup>

I Pictures—in the sense of still photographs—can be divided into two classes, private and public.

*Private* pictures are those designed for display within the intimate social circle of the persons featured in them—pictures taken (with or without recourse to a professional photographer) in order to commemorate occasions, relationships, achievements, and life-turning points, whether of a familial or organizational kind.

The special properties of private pictures as part of our domestic ceremonial life are worth considering, and this can be done best, perhaps, by starting with ceremony and working to pictures.

Ritual and ceremonial involve portraiture, involve making palpable to the senses what might otherwise remain buried and tacit in the structure of social life. The traditional argument is that these enactments function to reaffirm basic social arrangements and ultimate beliefs regarding man and nature.

Ritual and ceremonial are accomplished through doings—through making appearances, taking up microecological positions relative to others, performing gestures—and in the nature of doings are soon, if not quickly, completed or played out. (Duration can vary anywhere from the micro-second taken to administer a smile to the six weeks required for the most obdurate of festivities.) As such, these acts can be distinguished from another class of devices which also help (albeit in a very small way) to maintain us in felt support of our social structure: souvenirs, mementoes, gifts, commemoratives, and other relics. These objects, oftentimes directly a part of what it is they celebrate, just as often poorly portray these celebrated social arrangements. But since objects are involved, not actions, things, not enactments, they can last a long time—in the relevant sense forever.

Consider now the pictorial arts. A feature of drawings, paintings, sculpture, and especially photographs, is that these artifacts allow for a combination of ritual and relic. The rendition of structurally important social arrangements and ultimate beliefs which ceremony fleetingly provides the senses, still photography can further condense, omitting temporal sequence and everything else except static visual arrays. And what is caught is fixed into permanent accessi-

<sup>1</sup>I have benefited from harsh criticism and a great number of useful suggestions from Sol Worth; also, in a general way, from Goodman (1968).

bility, becoming something that can be attended anywhere, for any length of time, and at moments of one's own choosing.

Thus it is in modern times—and as the modern contribution to ceremonial life—that whenever there is a wedding, an investiture, a birthday party, a graduation exercise, an extended voyage begun or terminated, a picnic, a shop opening, a vacation, or even a visit, snapshots may well be taken, developed, and the prints kept easy to hand.<sup>2</sup> Something like self-worship can thus be accomplished. The individual is able to catch himself at a moment when—for him—he is in ideal surroundings, in association with socially desirable others, garbed in a self-enhancing way (which for white-collar men may mean the rough and manly wear of fishermen, hunters, wranglers, or machinists), poised for a promising take-off, terminating an important engagement, and with a socially euphoric look on his face. A moment when what is visible about him attests to social matters about which he is proud. A moment, in short, when he is in social bloom, ready, therefore, to accept his appearance as a typification of himself.<sup>3</sup> This moment he can dry-freeze and hang on the walls of his house, his office, his shop, his locker, and his wallet, a reference point to which he can return time and again (and long after he can no longer live the scene) as testimonial, as evidence, as depiction, of what his best social self has been and, by implication, must still be. A modest pact with the devil: the individual can shift the ravages of time from his triumphant appearances to his current ones, the only cost being to have slightly spoiled involvement in these former scenes, these high points, consequent on the postural reframing distractively induced by either the immanent prospect of being snapped or the mechanics of doing the snapping or (with Polaroid) a viewing of the viewing.

II *Public* pictures are those designed to catch a wider audience—an anonymous aggregate of individuals unconnected to one another by social relationship and social interaction, although falling within the same market or the same political jurisdiction, the same outreaches of appeal. Here a photographic print is usually not the final form, only a preliminary step in some type of photo-mechanical reproduction in newspapers, magazines, books, leaflets, or posters.

Public pictures themselves are diverse in function and character. For example, there are commercial pictures

<sup>2</sup>During the recent European wars, military personnel of all ranks seemed drawn to photographic portraiture in dress uniform—a commonality of ritual orientation that cut across nations and alliances. Why? To provide a memorial image that might well turn out to be the last one? (But then why not in civvies?) To bolster a social identity newly minted and therefore shaky? To mark the occasion of elevation to one's current military rank, whatever that happened to be? Or is the wearing of a uniform that neatly identifies one's situation in life to all viewers (at a time when one suddenly finds oneself in a situation that can be neatly identified) already a kind of portraiture, whose reproduction then momentarily reestablishes portraiture in its normal role?

<sup>3</sup>A similar argument concerning the content of home movies may be found in Chalfen (1975:95-97).

designed to sell a product for an advertiser.

There are news photos, involving matters held to be of current scientific, social, and political concern.

There are instructional pictures, as found, say, in medical text books, the figures in them intended to be anonymous, serving only (apparently) as illustrations of what can be visited on man. (In fact, many illustrations, including the line drawings in dictionaries, are also typifications, a variable mixture unadmittedly responsive to preconceptions concerning the average, the essential, and the ideal.)

There are human interest pictures, also anonymous, oftentimes candid, in which otherwise unnoteworthy individuals confirm our doctrine of expression by eloquently (and presumably unintendedly) choreographing some response, such as fear, puzzlement, surprise, love, shyness, or some inner state, such as joy, hopelessness, innocence, or how we look and what we do when we think no one is present to observe us. To which must be added scenes that a well-placed camera can compose into some sort of "aesthetic" design or into a conventionally evocative portrait of nature. All of these pictured scenes can hopefully be viewed as ends in themselves, timeless, and arty. (In this domain, observe, the line between private and public can waver.<sup>4</sup> Countless enthusiasts are encouraged by a mass hobby apparatus to invest in serious photographic equipment, acquire professional techniques, and take non-family pictures styled for hanging in a gallery. Although only friends and relatives of the household are likely to view the results, in principle they do so "critically" in their capacity as anonymous members of the wider public. And should a larger stage be offered the amateur, the occasion is likely to be seized as recognition, not avoided as an invasion of privacy.)

Finally, there are personal publicity pictures, ones designed to bring before the public a flattering portrait of some luminary, whether political,<sup>5</sup> religious, military, sporting, theatrical, literary,<sup>6</sup> or—where a class elite still functions and is publicized—social.

Involved here are actual or putative leadership and symbolization of some structure or hierarchy or value presentable as central to society. Note, the publicity function extends far beyond personal publicity shots, seeping into almost every kind of picture. Commercial pictures often link a product to a celebrity, selling them both. The pictorial record made of important public ceremonies necessarily gives

<sup>4</sup>For this and other suggestions, I am grateful to Dorothea Hurvich.

<sup>5</sup>A deft discussion of political portraits is Roland Barthes' "Photography and Electoral Appeal" (1972:91-93).

<sup>6</sup>For male novelists pictured on the back of their dust covers, this means (currently) rough, open shirts, tousled hair, youthful, virile appearance, and often a brooding look, this last bespeaking the deep thoughts that are proper to the innards of the species. Male poets may feel obliged to appear even more feeling. Nonfiction writers also present pictures of themselves as part of the merchandising of their product, but their posing suggests more the steady march of thought than the psychic cost of so directly addressing the human condition. Interestingly, even those who publish slashing analyses of advertising find reason to allow their pictures to appear on the jacket in a posture calculated to confirm that qualities of the book are to be seen in qualities of the appearance of the writer, thus promoting a folk theory of expression along with their books and themselves.

personal publicity to those who officiate. News events are very often presented through the words and presence of political leaders, a write-up of the first accompanied by a picture of the second. Human interest shots have more interest if they involve famous subjects. Even the celebrity's personal-life rituals can be publicized as a means of affirming in everyone's life what is being affirmed in his own, so that whatever his particular domain, he will tend to become a public performer of private ceremonies and have extra reason on such occasions for taking pictures and ensuring that they are good ones—a mutual contamination of public and private which comes to a head in fan magazines. In the limiting case of a social elite, mere attendance at a particular social function or mere visiting of a particular place can qualify as newsworthy, these performers being empowered to transform social participation from routine into ritual. A reminder that every undertaking has a sacred element and can be done in circumstances which realize its hierarchical potential. Here, may I add, the British Royal Family is the modern creative force, leading the civilized world in know-how for the mass production of personal publicity.

Celebrities not only link their own private lives to the public domain, but also can link the lives of private persons to it. For persons in the public eye representing something of value and concern to many—persons possessing regional or national renown—seem to acquire as one of their powers the capacity to be a contagious high point. Politicians, sports stars, entertainers, and other notables qualify. In contrast to pictures of Jesus, Lenin, and the British Royal Family, those of ordinary celebrities are not always likely to carry enough ritual impact to warrant a place on the mantel; nonetheless, celebrities need but pose for a picture in the company of a member of their public to manufacture a memento for him, one that speaks to his ideal attributes, a sort of elevation by photographically attested association. Note that a personal inscription can function as a weak substitute for joint appearance.<sup>7</sup> (In exchange for their endorsement, then, celebrities acquire a small billboard, rent free.) Thus in bars, restaurants, drycleaning establishments, and offices, these trophies jostle with family pictures, the latter being trophies, too, for they attest to the domestic property (and domestic piety) of the establishment's proprietor, which property, incidentally, has also been photographed in ideal circumstances.

In all of this, note, photographic portraiture represents a rather significant social invention, for, even apart from its role in domestic ritual, it has come to provide a low and very little guarded point in the barrier that both protects and restrains persons of private life from passing over into public recognition.

III To consider photographs—private and public—it is necessary, apparently, to consider the question of perception and reality, and it is necessary to control

<sup>7</sup>American presidents have the distinction (one of their few) of having circulated inscribed pictures in their pre-election capacity, and after election circulating ones that qualify as hangable without an inscription.

somehow the systematic ambiguities that characterize our everyday talk about pictures.

(1) Pictures comprise the class of two-dimensional images that have been processed into fixed form, the chief examples being drawings, paintings, photographs, and, of course, letterpress reproductions of them all. (What Narcissus saw was a reflection, not a photograph.) A "real" or "actual" photograph consists of a piece of stiff, emulsified paper containing marks and shadings on one side, a text providing us with an image that has been processed photographically, not some other way. (Obviously, a photograph does not embody objects that it pictures—as Sol Worth remarks, a picture of fire is not hot—although some might want to say that the exposed surface does embody a perspectival transformation of some of the relationships within the scene upon which the camera focused.) By this definition it follows that a photograph that has been "touched up," miscaptioned, or even doctored is still a real one. The realness of a photograph would only figure when, say, there was a concern to prevent it from getting crumpled, soiled or torn, or to control the effect of the texture of a paper stock upon depth perception, or to discover that what appeared to be a photograph was indeed a cleverly disguised realistic painting. (What is only something else and not really a photograph involves a slightly different, and certainly lesser, issue than that of what is not really something else but only a photograph. For there are lots of flat, papery things that a photograph can replicate—whether or not with intent to deceive—dollar bills, water colors, and cardiograms being examples; indeed, with experimental controls a photograph pasted into a window can be mistaken for a three dimensional real scene.<sup>8</sup>)

Consideration of what is a "real" picture leads to a consideration of what is the "same" picture, and thus to a version of the type-token issue. We speak of the "same" or "identical" picture when referring to two quite different possibilities: two like prints from the self-same negative, and two meetings-up with the self-same print. I don't think this particular ambiguity causes trouble; in any case, unlike the situation with coins, here terminology is ready to hand any time we need to specify.

I believe that the significant question, and one that everyday use and terminology does obscure, is not what a photograph is, or what would count as the same photograph, but what a particular photograph is *of*—a concern, incidentally, that allows one to treat a

photograph and its printing press reproduction as the same.

Somehow we learn to decode small, flat tracings for large, three dimensional scenes in a manner somewhat corresponding to the way we have learned to interpret our visual images of real objects. (Because a photograph has nearly perfect geometric perspective—saving one taken, for example, with a distorting wide-angle lens—it is very like the image projected on the retina of one eye, were the retina to be blocked from its usual scanning; but retinal images themselves are systematically modified by constancy scaling based on additional depth cues drawn in part from stereoscopic and parallax-motion effects which photography must do without.)<sup>9</sup> Here the point is not that our use of our eyes and our pictures has had to be learned, or that this learning draws deeply and fallibly on past experience with the world in all sensory modalities (allowing us to make effective use of small cues and good hypotheses as to which of a set of possible states is to be judged the actual one), but that it *does* get learned (in our society), rendering the eyeing of live scenes, and of pictures of scenes, efficacious and more or less equivalent. And note, this deciphering competency that we acquire with respect to live scenes, and pictures of scenes, does not make us acute about just any set of perceptual details, but rather those which allow us to make conventionally important discriminations; for it is about these matters that are of general social relevance that we will have bothered to accumulate experience.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps, then, the primary difference between an interpretation of a live view and an interpretation of a picture of it is that live viewing ordinarily assures that what is seen is as it appears now, whereas a picture, at best, guarantees that it was once so.

In sum, one can say that, as a result of acquired interpretive competence, things (or rather aspects of things) in effect are as they seem to be seen, and as they seem to be pictured, notwithstanding the fact that the actual image on the retina and on the photographic paper is a somewhat different matter. And one should be able to say that a photograph in effect can provide us with an objective, veridical version—an "actual picture of" socially important aspects of what is in fact out there.

However, these conclusions drawn from the psychology of perception fail to tell us why there should be so much doubt and concern among students as to what in fact photographs do represent. The frame-theoretical issue of the various

<sup>8</sup>It is worth noting that art historians who compare various forms of representation—etchings, woodcuts, drawings, paintings, photographs—and use illustrations in their books to explicate the differences, tend to treat the ground of their own operation, letterpress graphics, as something to be taken for granted, something without constraining characteristics of its own, in this following the lay framing practice of treating the medium in which one is oneself working as limitless and featureless.

<sup>9</sup>A close issue here. Apart from the question of permanency, a camera can take an instantaneous picture that contains vastly more detail, shading, and breadth than the eye can capture in the same length of time, the eye being restricted apparently to flitting about taking spot checks which the brain then edits and composes accordingly. However, before the camera's pictures (once developed and printed) can be of any final use, an eye must view it, and *that*

viewing will suffer all the limits of the eye compared to the camera plus an extra set, namely, the limitation of having to start with a photograph, not the real thing.

<sup>10</sup>The framework of experience required in order to interpret some photographs (such as those taken of missile sites, elementary particle pathways, minor meteors) may be so restricted that a lay person might not even be able to see what he is seeing when it is pointed out. However, valid perception is not a question of votes but of competence, W. I. Thomas notwithstanding. And that is not to say that viewers somehow read beyond the "simple" physical images that are "given" them; for a physicalistic, "objective," "literal" description is itself, of course, interpretive, having to be learned, too—a fact quite independent of how common this learning is. There are no naked facts, merely various types of inferential elaboration, but *that* is not to say that inferences, common or otherwise, are necessarily arbitrary.

senses in which pictures are said to be true, real, valid, candid, realistic, expressive, or, contrariwise, false, faked, posed, unfaithful, doctored, gayed, still remains open, and social, not psychological, answers must be sought. The easy sense of the man in the street that the meaning of pictures is clear enough comes from an easy willingness to avoid thinking about the meanings of meaning.

(2) It is clear that an artist can execute a drawing or painting from memory and imagination, processing an image of, say, a person who is no more or even never was. One might say that the result was a picture of a *subject* (or "figure"), not meaning to imply by this "of" that the subject is now, or ever was, real. Subjects belong to very human realms of being but not always to the current, real world. A subject, note, may be a building or a landscape or a stag at bay or the crossing of the Delaware; it can also be a person, the chief concern here. (French in this regard is clearer than English: a special reference for the word *personnage* designates a member of the fictional realm, the term *personne* being reserved for designating a member of ours.)

Now it happens that when something that is not present to him is to be the subject of a painter's work, he may steady his task of rendition by employing a stand-in, mock-up, or substitute—things of this world that are materially to hand and can serve as guides during phases of the canvas processing. Thus, for an historical figure, he may use a living person there in the flesh; for a mythical beast with unnatural appendages, a real beast with natural ones. A material guide is often called a model, especially when a person or animal is involved, and will be called that here, although other (and confusingly relevant) meanings can also be given to that term (Goffman 1974, esp. 41). Note, incidentally, a parallel distinction in the theater, where it is fully understood that a character or protagonist belongs to a make-believe realm of being that is dramatized, and the actor who takes a part and stages its character belongs to another, namely, everyday reality. Indeed, from the theater comes the term "prop" to remind us that some artifacts have, as it were, no life of their own, taking their identifying title from the fact that their crude similarity to certain objects in the real world (along with their cheapness and maneuverability) allows them to be used in plays as if they were these objects, this role in dramaturgy being their only one.

If one allows that a painter may use a material object as a

guide (whether model, prop, or whatever) to help him in his rendering, and if this guiding function is taken as central to one's conception of such objects, then one might extend the category to include objects which the artist uses not only as a guide but also as a subject. After all, to sit for a portrait is to serve as a subject *and* as its model, and so one is forced to say that a stand-in can be the real thing.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike what is required in drawing, painting, or fiction, but like the theater, a photograph *requires* material guides—"models" in the cases that interest us. The play of light and shadow upon something out there in the real world is necessary, and furthermore, is necessary at the moment the picture is taken.

Observe that just as a photograph can be said to be *of* its subject, this being our first sense of "of," so it can be said to be *of* its model, this being our second sense of "of." The convenience of using one word here instead of two, is, I believe, a disaster for analysis, for although biblical paintings and the theatrical stage provide no problem in the distinction between subject and model (or character and actor), photography deeply confounds the matter in several ways—now merging subject and model, now concealing a difference, now taking a difference for granted, and in general causing us to think we are concerned with one problem when we really are concerned about another.

**IV** (1) A "caught" or "candid" photograph may be defined as featuring models that have not been arrayed to serve as such, that is, to serve as something to photograph on this occasion. Such pictures show objects and events as they are in regard to some matters other than photography. For human models this means ordinarily that they are unaware that a camera is where it is, or that they are so deeply caught up in other vital matters that they either give no weight to the fact that they are being photographed or modify whatever they are doing only to the extent required for a disjunctive monitoring shift in response to the sudden appearance of a camera.<sup>12</sup> (All models can be angled, if not manipulated, for photographic effect; only human ones can do this on their own behalf.) Caught pictures can provide valid documents or records, allowing the viewer to make relatively reliable inferences as to what had led up to the activity represented and what was likely to have

<sup>11</sup> Matters can get a little complicated here. A movie actor may be given a stand-in so that in staging a character he himself will not have to engage in tedious or dangerous activity. Clearly (and simply): a model for a model. Novelists, with no intent to engage in covert biography, sometimes pattern a fictional character upon a real person in their social circle, subject and model here being quite distinct, there being an obligation to blur the copy and make a secret of the identity of the model. Biography, on the other hand, allows and requires that the subject and model be one. In biographical plays, then, the character onstage becomes a refraction both of the actor who is taking the part and of the person who was the inspiration for the part. It is a tart experience (or a sad experience), but not necessarily a confusing one, that is produced when the inspiration for a character serves also as the actor of the part, as when the famous gunfighters of the West ended their years by "going on the road" with enactments of themselves. The tricky case is the *roman à clef*, where a connection between subject and model is formally denied (as prefatory admonitions regarding the coincidence of resemblance attest) but

guessing at the identity of the model is encouraged (or at least thought to be), along with the belief that the copying is close.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, matters are a little more complicated. Of the infinite number of scenes photographers might catch, they manage to (and bother to) catch only a small number, and these tend to be ones whose content make evident that the pictures could only have been caught. So a caught picture turns out to be a patently caught one. Also note that whereas the term "caught" seems to be preferentially applied to a scene upon which a camera would have been unlikely, the term "candid" seems to be preferentially used in reference to scenes wherein the participants would ordinarily have been unwilling to continue on with what they had been doing had they but known that a camera was in action. Understandably, some candid pictures present models breaking frame, not only turning precipitously to monitor the camera's intrusion, but also simultaneously attempting to obscure the appearance they had been giving. What is candid about such pictures turns out to be covering behavior, not what the behavior covers.

followed, in the same way, if to a lesser extent, as can an actual viewer of a live scene infer what is going on at the moment of viewing. It is in this way that caught pictures can be used as strong evidence concerning the existence of a state of affairs or of the occurrence of an event. Thus, a pictured individual who can be "personally identified," that is, a subject that provides us with effective evidence of the biographical identification of its model, can serve to demonstrate that its model had been in a certain place doing a certain thing and in association with certain others, which demonstration courts of law may be induced to accept. For example, insurance claims for injuries have been defeated by photographs secretly taken of the claimant while he was engaged in demanding performances, such as bowling, climbing ladders, and the like. Denial of "knowing" someone has similarly been defeated by pictures of the claimant chatting with the person he claims not to know. Bank robbers have faced similar problems due to security photography. In fact, on occasion in courts, claims as to what occurred may find better support through photographs than through direct testimony. Drawings, however realistic, are not used in this particular way, although they can be employed in identificatory police work.<sup>13</sup>

(2) Caught photographs are to be contrasted to another class, whose members share the property that inferences as to what was going on in the scene *cannot* be correctly made from what is pictured.

First, there are photographs (often caught ones) which have been covertly "doctored" or "faked," as when a picture of someone's face is superimposed on a picture of someone else's body, and the whole passed off as evidence that the

owner of the face was present in the scene depicted. Or a seriously misleading caption is employed encouraging a false attribution of model to subject.

Second are the kind of pictures that can be said to be arranged, rigged, or set up, implying that models and scenic materials, real enough in their own right, were brought together and choreographed to induce radically wrong inferences as to "who" had been present and/or what had been going on. The result is a picture of a covertly contrived scene; the *picture* is an actual one, but it is not *actually* of the scene it portrays. The classic case here is the collusively arranged infidelity picture, once so popular in British divorce proceedings, providing perfectly valid evidence that a particular man had been in a particular room with a particular woman not his wife, the misleading restricted to their doings and her professional identity. The wrong impression the court is induced to receive (or rather gives the appearance of receiving) is much like the one that the hotel clerk could have obtained of the actual doings, although he might get to see the picture taking as well as the scene the picture taker took. Observe that a doctored picture, whether intended to mislead or not, requires no cooperation from the models, the fabrication being done after, not before, picture taking; rigged pictures, on the other hand, ordinarily require collaborative posing before the picture is snapped, although admittedly if models are caught at the right moment from the right angle, they can find that they have unintentionally produced a picture that is rigged in effect,<sup>14</sup> as they can if they know they are about to be photographed but the photographer does not know they know. Observe, too, that although eyes and cameras can be similarly fooled, it is

<sup>13</sup> In his *Art and Illusion*, E. H. Gombrich presents the interesting argument that a picture cannot be true or false in itself, these possibilities being reserved for the caption or label:

Logicians tell us—and they are not people to be easily gainsaid—that the terms "true" and "false" can only be applied to statements, propositions. And whatever may be the usage of critical parlance, a picture is never a statement in that sense of the term. It can no more be true or false than a statement can be blue or green. Much confusion has been caused in aesthetics by disregarding this simple fact. It is an understandable confusion because in our culture pictures are usually labeled, and labels, or captions, can be understood as abbreviated statements. When it is said "the camera cannot lie," this confusion is apparent. Propaganda in wartime often made use of photographs falsely labeled to accuse or exculpate one of the warring parties. Even in scientific illustrations it is the caption which determines the truth of the picture. In a *cause célèbre* of the last century, the embryo of a pig, labeled as a human embryo to prove a theory of evolution, brought about the downfall of a great reputation. Without much reflection, we can all expand into statements the laconic captions we find in museums and books. When we read the name "Ludwig Richter" under a landscape painting, we know we are thus informed that he painted it and can begin arguing whether this information is true or false. When we read "Tivoli," we infer the picture is to be taken as a view of that spot, and we can again agree or disagree with the label. How and when we agree, in such a case, will largely depend on what we want to know about the object represented. The Bayeux tapestry, for instance, tells us there was a battle of Hastings. It does not tell us what Hastings "looked like." [1961:67-68].

In sum, a caption frames a picture, telling us what aspect of it is to be attended and in what light this aspect of matters is to be seen—e.g., the way things once were, the way they might be in the future, the

dream of the artist, a tribute to the style of some period, and so forth. But, of course, this approach entirely begs the question. In a great number of contexts an uncaptioned photograph *is* understood to present a claim regarding the properties and character of the model, courts of law only being the most obvious. (The very fact that effort is made to doctor pictures presupposes that ordinarily pictures imply an avowal about reality and that this avowal is ordinarily valid; the same assumption is not made of other modes of representation, and understandably so.) Any object, not merely a picture, is subject to covert simulation and various forms of overt reconstituting. These transformations nonetheless remain just that, transformations of an original. But granted that the interpretation a picture is given, that is, the sense in which it is taken, derives from the context of use, one must see that the caption, when there is one, is but one part of this context. A caption, then, can be true or false only if *its* context carries another caption, albeit a tacit one: "The statements made here are meant to be taken as avowals of what is." And the reading a caption can cause us to make of a picture, other elements of context can cause us to make of the caption. (The caption "fantasy" can tell us how to read a picture in an art book, but what does it tell us about a picture in the National Lampoon?) A statement of fact, laconic or expanded, can be presented as a quotation, an example of literary style, a display of print format, etc., being no less vulnerable to special readings than are pictures. In any case, a photograph that is falsely captioned (whether to deceive or for openly playful purposes) can still present a perfectly valid representation of its model, the only problem being that the model can't be correctly identified from the caption. May I add that although obviously the angle, light, timing, camera distance, lens, film development, printing, and the photographer's intent can very significantly influence what a picture reproduces, in every case the model must introduce a pattern of constraints as well.

<sup>14</sup> For this, and for other suggestions incorporated without acknowledgment, I am grateful to Richard Chalfen.

usually far easier to hoodwink the viewer of a picture than the viewer of a live scene, for reasons quite apart from, say, the consequence of insufficient depth cues. For the still photographer's practice of holding his camera to a small field and (necessarily) to a single angle can, in the shooting of a rigged scene, protect his illusion from anything disconfirming that might lie just beyond the posing; and what has been posed need only be held long enough to snap it. A live viewer could hardly be restricted this way, and unless he wore blinders and kept his head in a vice, would have to be faced with fakery that is considerably more extensive if it is to be effective—although admittedly he is not often in a position to pore over what he sees for flaws, whereas the viewer of a picture usually is.

(3) Pictures that are covertly doctored or covertly rigged display scenes that can't be read in the same way that uncontrived ones routinely can, as a swarm of warrants for drawing sound conclusions as to who had been present and what had been going on there. Such covertly faked pictures—"fabrications"—are to be distinguished from ones that are also concocted, but this time admittedly, whether by arranging what is photographed or doctoring a photograph already taken.<sup>15</sup> Openly contrived scenes provide a "keying" of photographic evidence as to who was present and what had been going on.<sup>16</sup> The central example here is what might be called "commercial realism," the standard transformation employed in contemporary ads, in which the scene is conceivable in all detail as one that could in theory have occurred as pictured, providing us with a simulated slice of life; but although the advertiser does not seem intent on passing the picture off as a caught one, the understanding seems to be that we will not press him too far to account for just what sort of reality the scene has. (The term "realistic," like the term "sincerity" when applied to a stage actor, is self-contradictory, meaning something that is praiseworthy by virtue of being like something else, although not that something else.) Commercial realism is to be sharply distinguished from scenes posed with unlikely professionals and apparently intended to be wrongly seen as caught, and from scenes that *are* caught ones but now embedded in an advertisement.<sup>17</sup> Observe that commercial realism provides

especially nice examples of the subject-model issue. Asked what is in a particular ad, we might say, "A family fishing." What makes us think the four subjects in the picture are in a family relationship to one another is exactly what might make us infer such a relationship with respect to strangers in real life. So, too, on seeing images of fishing lines in the water. Asked whether we think the four persons who modeled for the picture are *really* a family or if there are hooks on the lines, the answer could well be, "Probably not, but what does it matter?" The point about an ad is what its composer meant us to infer as to what is going on in the make-believe pictured scene, not what had actually been going on in the real doings that were pictured. The issue is subject, not model.

It is thus that the constraints on picture scene production can be properly sorted. An ad featuring a nude woman subject raises questions about the modesty of the model, especially if she is a well-known one; an ad featuring nuns clustered in front of a station wagon in honor of GM's tilt-wheel steering can (and did) raise questions about the desecration of subjects—the models in this case being well covered by unaccustomed habit (see Livingston 1976).

Advertisements that employ commercial realism or some other variety of overtly concocted scene can be aptly compared to what the stage presents. In both cases the viewer is to engage knowingly in a kind of make-believe, treating the depicted world as if it were real-like but of course not actually real. The differences are interesting. One is that although we undoubtedly can involve ourselves more deeply in staged make-believe than in advertisements, it is probably the case that viewers more frequently reify, that is, "downkey," ads than plays; for we can always fall into thinking that an ad is like a news shot or a private portrait, its model rightly to be identified with its subject. (In any case, the imputation of realness to what a picture is of is unlikely to require our immediate intercession, the presented events having already transpired; on the other hand, when Othello attacks Desdemona, something will have to be done immediately by the audience if they have misframed him as endangering a real life.) Another difference: It is routine in play production that we know the personal identity of the models, at least the lead ones, and that our pleasure in the show derives in part from watching favorite actors at work, whatever the part they are currently at work in. In the case of ads, with very rare exception, the personal identity of the models is unknown to us, and we do not seek out this knowledge. Product testimony by celebrities, or by specially selected citizens whose actual names and addresses are provided, is quite another matter and is by way of being a fraud—a fabrication, not a keying. An interesting marginal case is the *photoroman*, popular on the continent, in which personally identified models—indeed "stars" of the cinematic world—perform for a series of stills in the manner of a comic book, projecting themselves in fictional parts much as they might on the screen, and as on the screen relying on their "own" identities as a source of drawing power (see Van Dormael 1974).

**V** Starting with caught scenes, the description has been complicated by adding ones that were fabricated and keyed. Now it is essential to go on to see that all these

<sup>15</sup> Currently newspapers and magazines exercise very wide liberty in presenting openly doctored pictures featuring bits of anatomy of celebrities, especially political ones, the portraits completed by line drawings, cartoons, other photographs, and the like. Precisely in what frame readers interpret such pictures is not clear, since what can be legally defended as an evident fantasy may not be so treated by some viewers.

<sup>16</sup> A fuller treatment of "keying" and "fabrication" is presented in Goffman (1974, esp. ch. 3, 4).

<sup>17</sup> There are deviations from commercial realism that are more subtle. Thus, one finds that a picture in an annual company report displaying the company's restaurant equipment with the aid of two secretaries posing as persons dining out and another as a waitress can convey not so much that there is a difference between subject and model, but that these particular models are not making every effort to conceal that they are unprofessional ones, thereby posing as models posing as participants in a restaurant scene. A comparable frame complexity is found in the use of simulated home movies as part of the scenario of a commercial one, or the use in radio commercials of "interviews" with carefully selected ordinary consumers, "citizens," who have been rehearsed into displaying the restarts, filled pauses, and little floodings that presumably distinguish the efforts of real interviewees from the responses performed by studio actors.



pictures share one important feature, namely, they are all *scenes*, that is, representations, whether candid, faked, or frankly simulated, of "events" happening. Narrative-like action is to be read from what is seen, a before and after are to be inferred, and this location in the ongoing stream of activity provides the context as much as do the models and props *per se*. All such pictures are to be distinguished from another class, namely, portraits, these being pictures—fabricated, keyed, or actually of—where action is absent or incidental, and it cannot quite be said that a scene is in progress. A subject is featured more than a stream of events.

(1) Consider first the matter of the personal portrait format itself. This format was there before the camera came in, has dominated private pictures, and is only now giving way: the model sits or stands in his finery, holds an absent, half-smiling expression on his face in the direction he is instructed to—a constraint only familiar from the military parade ground—and renders himself up to the judgment of eternity, the assumption rightly being that in many ways the model and the subject are one, a case of posing as oneself. No doubt this postural formula reflected the exposure needs of early film and the style (and requirements) established in painted portraiture—providing us a central case of pictures representing other pictures; in any case, no prototype is to be found in the responses individuals, at least sighted ones, have to any other circumstance in the workaday world.<sup>18</sup> (Certainly responses of every kind can be affected and held by brute force for lengthy periods, but these responses are presented as though in reaction to something other than picture taking.) When this portrait format is extended to commercial shots featuring a subject and a product, the unseeing expression often gives way to one that is not alien to natural life, merely crudely simulated: a frozen, summoning look, as though the subject were making eye contact, sometimes collusively, with someone there in the flesh behind the shutter, or with a wider group out there in camera land. Also found is an expression of defense against intrusion, a subtle means of encouraging the viewer to feel he is an actual participant in the depicted scene. So, too, subjects, especially female ones, may be shown returning our apparently intrusive look with one that passively submits to our gaze. More subtle still, the subject can give the appearance of turning away from a second figure in the picture sometimes to steal a look at a third figure, in any case allowing us to catch the maneuver from a disclosive angle so that we find ourselves more privy to this disloyalty of attention than is the subject who has lost it. The simulation

<sup>18</sup>In recent years stylish portrait photographers have broken with the traditional format. Instead of inducing frozen facial dignity in a model, they track down expressions of warmth, charm, liveliness, and so forth, producing a sense that the individual has been unself-consciously caught in action. To obtain these expressions, a considerable warm-up period may be employed and a second camera, so that the model will not quite know when and from what precise angle his image will be taken. In this way, every customer can be transformed into a fitting object for sympathetic, candid photography and high symbolism, becoming someone who expresses his character, as well as his status, allowing photographers to make a statement every time their camera speaks. It is through such practices that those who make a living reproducing appearances of life can continue further to stamp the real thing out.

of viewer-responsive facial expression by subjects somewhat changes a portrait into a scene and is, of course, a standard feature of Western painting.<sup>19</sup> And note the parallel to a phenomenon peculiar to the legitimate stage called "direct address."

(2) Early private photographic portraits employed canvas backdrops featuring sylvan or hellenic scenes (deemed proper in their three dimensional form to the gentry), thus taking open advantage of the principle that the camera, somewhat like the theatrical stage, drops from the world everything between the figures or objects in central focus and what lies in front, and at the same time tends to reduce what remains of the embedding context to a *background*, a depthless plane. A recent commercial version is the high fashion frieze—again something that does not mimic nature—which splays pristinely costumed female figures flush against exotic slabs of nature where perhaps only goats and mendicants are actually to be found, nature here serving as a substitute for canvas.

(3) In portraiture, this transformation of contextual space into a point of focus and a flat background is matched by the transformation of microecological space. Self-commemoration by a kin group, team, school, or association packs familiars into compact rank-and-file clusters, graded for height; decorative kneeling and pyramiding can also be employed. This assures that a likeness of all the faces will show in the picture, along with at least an inferential view of the corresponding bodies, and all this as large as the camera can manage. In this bunching-up of models in order to take a picture, microecology and body contact are given a systematically different reading than obtains in any other frame, although the staging of choral singers comes close. Observe, I have been talking about real space between real people—models, not subjects. The current commercial version of group pictures presents an even more striking reconstitution of space, for it brings into jolly togetherness a deep-sea diver, a Chinese cook, a ballet dancer, a black nurse, a middle-age housewife, and a grey-haired banker, causing subjects whom all of social life conspires to keep separate to be arm in arm, nullifying the basic metaphor indexing social distance through interpersonal physical space. But, of course, there is a profound difference between commemoratives and commercials. Teammates who entwine themselves for a portrait produce a picture of themselves displaying this territorial promiscuity; professional models who similarly pose themselves do not produce a picture of themselves but of subjects chosen by advertiser, and it is the intermingling of subjects in the pictured space, not models in the studio's, that is striking. After all, professional models, like professional actors, have given up almost all natural claims and can be caused to appear in almost any guise and almost any posture.

(4) An individual who serves as a model for a personal portrait—or does anything else—is someone with a unique biographical individuality, allowing for a matching between

<sup>19</sup>See, for example, Rubens' *Hélène Fourment in a Fur Coat*, and the discussion in Berger (1975:60-61). I might add that a whole art has developed in radio and TV to induce performers to project their talk as if to actual audiences located at some prescribed distance, and as if part of a current interaction. On the contingencies of training political candidates in these techniques, see Carey (1976).

subject and personal identity of the model, providing only that the model is known personally, or at least known *of*, by the viewer. (Thus the photographic game of identifying baby pictures or high school photos or of matching early pictures of celebrities against their current image.) For viewers of a portrait, this matching possibility is crucial; ritual use cannot be made of pictures of just anyone, only pictures of the famed or of those within one's own circle. In the case of commercial pictures, this linkage is unnecessary—except in regard to celebrity or “citizen” testimonials.

Observe that in photographic portraits, the model is frankly “posed.” His having taken up a position before the camera simply in order to be photographed in no way detracts from the picture being thought an authentic, “real” one. Moreover, what is pictured is what is really going on, namely, portraiture, the giving of the model over to the process of being rendered. We would not say, then, that such a picture was “merely posed,” as though to correct anyone's belief that it was something else. That the background may be a mere *picture* of scenery does not discredit the portrait either, for here there is no pretense that anything but a prop is involved.

One is reminded here of the frame complexity of apparently naive photographs and the diverse realms of being we seem able to easily amalgamate. For example, a photograph may involve not only a model who is a *real* person and a backdrop which is a *painting* of trees, but also a framed photograph or oil portrait, real in its own sense, used as a scenic resource, introducing still another plane of events. Indeed, at the turn of the century mortuary pictures were to be found in which a framed photographic portrait of the deceased was set amidst wreaths and real flowers, all placed in front of a cloudy canvas sky and photographed. (Incidentally, what resulted was a *photograph* of a photograph, something that is frame-distinct from a print off the same negative, the rephotograph of a photograph, and, of course, a letterpress reproduction of a photograph.) In all of these ways photographic portraiture has from the beginning involved embeddings of material from one frame into materials in another,<sup>20</sup> a practice, incidentally, long employed in painting.

A “real” photographic portrait may be one that strikes the viewer as bad in various ways: it may be unflattering or fail to capture the personality the model is “known” to have or be badly composed, lighted, printed, and so forth. But these deficiencies do not reflect on the genuineness or authenticity of the portrait. A question of fabrication and keying, a question of reality, would enter when we discovered that the portrait was “really” of someone else, merely someone who looked like the model we thought was involved or that the picture contained the mere posing of a posing, as when a commercial advertisement presents some-

<sup>20</sup>Examples may be found in Lesy (1973). Postcards early in this century also employed embeddings, the beautiful beloved of the lonely lover appearing in a balloon above his head, oftentimes competing for free space with her photograph or portrait, this being a third realm employed, I suppose, in case the point was missed. Note, the equivalent of a thought balloon's access to the heated brain of a figure was a privilege of novelists before the camera was invented.

thing meant to be seen as though a private photographic portrait when in fact a professional model did the work, posing in a way he would not were he posing for a photograph of himself for his own private use. To which must be added the fact that almost from the beginning of private personal photographic portraiture, models geyed the process, taking an avowedly “funny” picture, for example, one which extended the represented scenery into everything but a hole for the model's real head to be popped through, or one in which the model assumed a purposely comic pose. Commercial pictures then added a lamination, presenting pictures of professional models posed as private persons guying a portrait pose. I might add that when a genuine private photographic portrait is borrowed by a student, transformed into a slide, and presented to an audience as an instance of photographic portraiture, then one might have to say that although a real portrait is being used, it is not being used in the way intended, and no ritual attaches to its perception. Form remains; function changes.

Finally, look again at the notion of “posing.” A commercial model staging an ad in which he is to appear as a doctor is “posing,” an activity clearly different from “imposturing” as a doctor (as when someone attempts to practice medicine without training or a license), and akin to “acting” a medical role in a movie. But even more clearly, someone “posing” for his portrait is not doing so in the commercial model's sense. For, as suggested, in private portraits there is ordinarily no effort to use scenic cues to provide the viewer of the picture with an understanding that a make-believe world is pictured whose subjects have a social and personal identity little matching that of the models. Commercial posing avowedly transforms a model into almost anyone the advertiser wants to construct an imaginary scene around; private portraiture transforms a model into a decorative representation of himself, the two “ofs” of photography here nicely blended. Observe that the question of primping or posturing for the camera is not here at issue. Private portraiture, public portraiture for purposes of publicity, caught news shots of national leaders, and even art photography of “interesting looking” faces, all reflect the fundamental fact that their models are not presenting themselves in a personal or social identity not their “own”; that is what underlies our commonsense designation of these pictures as “actually of” their subjects. All are to be contrasted to commercial make-believe, whether fanciful or fully realistic, for whether a model poses as a doctor or Napoleon or the devil does not signify here; in all cases subject and model would not be the same, leading us to say that we do not have an *actual* picture of a doctor, Napoleon, or the devil. (Which is not to say that a model who poses as a doctor will not provide us with an actual *photograph*, nor an *actual* photograph of an adult, a male, a white person, a good-looker, a professional model, and so forth. Nor to deny that an actual photograph of a doctor is a possibility, whereas an actual photograph of Napoleon or the devil is not, although an actual photograph of an actual portrait of Napoleon is, whereas of the devil, not.)

**VI** It is apparent that the standards we bring to judging pictured scenes are not quite those we bring to judging picture portraits: of the first, is it doctored or

contrived, and in either case, covertly or overtly; of the second, is it "touched up," faithful, flattering, and the like. (Ordinary concerns usually neglect the possibility that what might seem to be a private portrait might really be the fabrication or keying of one, this neglect due, perhaps, to the fact that a portrait is already a keying, already a ritualization of the human form, already a departure from the simple rendering of an aspect of the world the way it is for us.) In any case, the question can be raised as to how, apart from portraiture, photographs can feature subjects in a way that is systematically different from the way their models might deploy themselves when not before a camera. Here, then, is a concern that does not bear on issues associated with the physiology and psychology of perception. In brief, what are the systematic differences between scenes openly contrived for picturing and live scenes whose participants are unconcerned about being photographed; or, put the other way, what are the systematic differences between pictures of openly contrived scenes and pictures of uncontrived ones?

(1) Perhaps the most obvious departure from reality that photography provides is commercial syncretism. The capacity to put together a realistic looking scene to photograph is not far away from the capacity to put together a scene whose individual elements are imaginable as real but whose combination of elements the world itself could not produce or allow. Thus fantastical pictures in which a subject speaks to us from within a block of ice or while soaring through the air, or mingles socially with figures from myth or with notables long since dead but now returned in their prime, or seriously displays ineptness, braggadocio, fearfulness, and hauteur we would only expect to find in conscious buffoonery, or is subjected to our reading his thoughts in a balloon that the other figures in the picture can't see. A more subtle complexity is found in those ads which intendedly satirize other ads, thus elevating the make-believe world portrayed in one picture into real materials to copy in the make-believe world of another, providing thus a keying of a keying.

(2) Consider now involvement structure. A feature of social situations is that participants are obliged to sustain appearances of spontaneous involvement in appropriate matters at hand. Evidence of an individual's involvement will come from the direction and mobility of his gaze, as well as the alignment of his eyes, head, and trunk, these ordinarily oriented in the same direction. Now it seems that of all obligatory appearances, that of correct involvement is the hardest to simulate, and this as if by design. Any attempt to produce an appropriate show of involvement in something tends to produce instead an appearance of involvement in the task of affecting such involvement.<sup>21</sup> Although most individuals acquire the capacity to convincingly contrive a show of interest in what another is saying or doing, ability falters when they are required to simulate "natural" involvement within more complex social arrangements, as when listening to talk that the talker is himself simulating, or expressing to one participant a shared reaction regarding another, or maintaining one conversation in very close proximity to another. At such moments the individual is

likely to induce a sense of uneasiness in viewers, due to the perceived overfixedness of his gaze and his failure to align trunk, head, and eyes in the manner we have come to expect. Perhaps the most obtrusive example is to be seen when an individual glances at a camera or persons monitoring him but tries to prevent his trunk and his head from following his eyes. May I add that our capacity to discern microscopic discrepancies in anticipated alignments of eyes, head, and trunk is simply enormous.

(3) Another sort of photographic departure from reality can be seen by contrasting portraits and scenes. It is clear that although an image of a person or even of a group of persons (if in staggered array) can be rather fully caught from the front by the camera's straight-on eye, the activity in natural social situations can rarely be well pictured from such an angle. Best vantage point must be chosen afresh for each configuration, and this can involve a positioning of the camera that an eye and its person could hardly manage in natural social life. More important, activity may have to be broken up and spread open, for a camera cannot peer inside the inward-facing encirclements often found. (After all, portrait posing is not a posture dictated by what can go on in social situations; it is through and through an answer to the special needs of the camera and to the character of portraiture.) And such a spread-out array can be staged to incorporate devices for directing the attention of the viewer to a central person, which devices do not otherwise appear in nature. Thus in political publicity shots, one practice is to have the leader's advisors and children turn their faces from the camera and self-effacingly look at the main figure, deictically pointing with their faces and sometimes their hands in the direction that attention is to follow, even while the central person waves directly to the camera and the crowd. All of this is found only where there is a front-on audience or a camera, and is radically different from the inward turning exhibited in ordinary face-to-face interaction.<sup>22</sup>

There are other instructive differences between portraits and pictured scenes. In both cases, the persons who model for the pictures have unique biographical (personal) identities. As suggested, for the owner of a photographic portrait, the possibility of making this identification is central to the ritual function the portrait will have. But not so in the case of commercial pictures, except perhaps when the picture features a personal testimonial.<sup>23</sup> Presumably

<sup>22</sup>Other unnatural devices for exhibiting dominance are available to photographers. For example, a cliché of advertisements is to picture one individual who is in the close company of another looking at that other adoringly and self-effacingly, as if the other's use of the advertised product had rendered him worthy of such attention. Although openly loving looks at close quarters are sometimes addressed to the very young as part of their easy transformation into nonpersons, these expressions between adults are not common, being incompatible with other interaction obligations of the adorer to the adored.

<sup>23</sup>Portraits taken of anonymous models by renowned photographers can become prized by the collectors, and in this sense have ritual value, but here because the picture provides a contact with the taker, not the taken. There are, of course, various efforts to constitute photographs into objects of scarcity—into relics—and thereby into items of monetary value. Prints from the original negative are apparently distinguishable from re-photographs of the text. The skill involved in developing and enlarging can itself be claimed as identifiable and therefore a means of distinguishing products. Etc. (For all of which, and for much other help, I am grateful to Lee Ann Draud.)

<sup>21</sup>See Goffman, "Alienation from Interaction" (1967:113-136).

what the advertisement is concerned to depict is not particular individuals already known, but rather activity which would be recognizable were we to see it performed in real life by persons not known to us personally. (Which is not to say that the subjects may not be depicted in a manner to imply that they would naturally know each other very well.) In effect, pictured scenes show examples of categories of persons, not particular persons. Now observe that although in real life we obtain lots of views of persons whom we can merely place in social categories, unless we also know them personally or have good business reasons to be dealing with them, we are not in a position to witness what we witness about them in commercial scenes. Indeed, there are many pictured scenes, such as that of husband and wife in their bedroom, that no business or acquaintanceship could warrant our seeing. Only a peeping tom of unprecedented capabilities could manage the view. Like readers of what a novelist supplies of his characters, the viewer becomes god-like, unconstrained by any need of legitimate social grounds for being privy to what is depicted in the scene.<sup>24</sup> In short, the possibility of arranging a scene from the visual pinpoint of view of a single camera's eye—into which angle and distance of vision vast hordes of viewers can be thrust—is a social license as well as an optical one.

(4) A feature of the photographic frame is the possibility of eschewing the depiction of ordinary life for high symbolism. Thus, an image of part of a model's body can be made to fill the whole picture, articulated to be read as a deep comment on the entire human condition, not merely an example drawn from it, and providing us with a picture whose subject is not a person but a small part of the anatomy, such as a fingertip. A lesser version of this expressionism must be considered, being more common and probably more significant.

In real situations, we externalize our circumstances and intent, in effect facilitating the adaptation of others in our surround to us. But in a manner of speaking, this display tends to occur as part of a stream of acts in the same order of being, some of which acts have just occurred and others of which are likely to start occurring. In private and publicity portraiture, individuals can be given a quite different relation to what they display. Two boxers taking weighing-in publicity shots will assume a fighting pose, choreographing an illustration of the actions they will engage in. But these actions are "mere" representations, totally cut off from any actual sequence in which the originals might occur. And indeed, little competence in fistic arts is required to evince the pose. What we obtain are photographic recordings of emblems, not actions. Similarly, when a renowned scientist graciously submits to a magazine interview (in the interests of disseminating knowledge), he is likely to be posed fingering his equipment as though a slice of his occupational life had been caught: he is shown peering into a microscope, writing a formula on the board, holding a test tube up to the

light, or arranging a fossil. Thereby he crudely mimes a posture plucked from his own role, momentarily transforming the living tools of his trade into dramaturgic equipment and himself into a pantomimist of fixed expressions. And what we see is not a photographic record of an actual scene from the scientist's life, as would be available were a secret camera trained on his laboratory, nor a clever contrivance of such a photographic record (this presented either as a real one or as an admitted simulation), but something that is *only* to be found as a posing for a picture, having been staged in response to a conception of what would make a colorful, telling photograph, and, behind this, a conception of what constitutes the appropriate convention for "representing" the particular calling.<sup>25</sup> Obviously in all these cases what one has is not intention display in the ethological sense, since emblems of the model's calling do not tell us what is to happen (or what is threatened or promised), but rather the sort of activity the model chooses to be identified with, this activity being symbolized, as it were, by a quotation of one of its dramatically telling phases.<sup>26</sup> What in fact probably has happened is that the staff photographer has okayed the pose, and what probably will happen is that the scientist will soon exchange pleasantries with his departing guests—these events belonging to an order of activity radically different from the one intently portrayed in the picture.

**VII** It is plain, then, that except in the case of caught scenes, the arrangements of models and scenic resources that the camera photographs will differ systematically from the way the unposing world is. Now one should consider the contrary issue: the carryover of the way the world is to any photograph. For the transformational code for representing reality in pictures—the photographic frame—would hardly be a code were not some sort of relationship systematically preserved between what is transformed and the transformation. But in the question of carryover, some preliminary discussion is required.

Photographs (like pencil sketches) can be used to *illustrate*

<sup>25</sup> For this latter point, and for other suggestions incorporated without further acknowledgment, I am very grateful to John Carey.

<sup>26</sup> Scientists are here used as an example because one might think they would balk at such nonsense. Examples are even easier to find among business leaders who appear in news magazines and annual company reports busy with an executive-like action whose posing could only have taken them away from such duties. In truth it seems that nigh everyone can be persuaded by publicists to appear to the public at large in a mock-up of themselves and their occupations, an amateur theatrics to which politicians are also willing to subject their greetings, farewells, commiserations, and other intimacy rituals. Nor is this readiness to reframe one's own doings so that the public will get a synoptic view of one's role a particularly contemporary phenomenon. Bourgeois society has never wanted for persons ready to see the need for a permanent display of themselves in somber portrait oils, clutching a book, a ledger, a riding crop, or a rose, framing themselves thus in some sort of mystical relation to the equipment of their vocation, a touching encouragement to the worship that others might be willing to offer to exemplifications of what is best in humanity. Perhaps one should see the readiness for this sort of personal publicity as entirely natural to the self, and a modest life a perversion forced upon the masses for want of anything like an adequate supply of board rooms and marble fireplaces.

<sup>24</sup> Cartoon strips provide other transformations of the everyday. For example, the protagonists can be at a distance or even hidden yet their words can be ballooned into the foreground, in effect allowing the viewer to bug distal voices. Here, and in regard to other aspects of the transformation rules of the cartoon frame, see Fresnault-Deruelle (1975a, 1975b, 1976).

behavioral practices and arrangements, typically by virtue of models having been posed accordingly. The kind of practices photographs can best illustrate are those that are firmly codified as to form and can be represented from beginning to end, *in toto*, within the visual field that can be nicely encompassed by short-range camera focus.<sup>27</sup> Of course, one is likely to be interested in photographable behavioral practices because they are routinely associated with particular social meanings, and it is admittedly the sign vehicle, not the signification, that is precisely illustratable.

As I use the term "illustration," no implication is intended about existence; an illustrated practice may have occurred, but illustration itself does not attest to such occurrence, belonging to subjects, not models. It is, then, perfectly reasonable to expect that illustrations may be found across several modes of representation, some clearly involving make-believe. For example, the "arm-lock," the standard adult cross-sex tie-sign in our society, can be illustrated by means of what can be found in comics, cartoons, realistic ads, news shots of celebrities who are "on," two actors taking the part of a couple on the theatrical stage, caught pictures from ordinary life scenes, and, of course, live scenes. More to the point, across these quite different realms of being, no systematic relevant difference seems detectable in the armlocks depicted; the form of this display can be, and very often is, perfectly represented *in toto* in any of these frames.

Photographs can also be used to provide documentation or an *instance-record* of the sort of behavioral practice which can be illustrated pictorially. An instance-record is evidence (which a mere illustration is not) that an instance of the practice *did* occur as pictured on the occasion of the picture taking. Call such a picture an *instantiation*. Note that a picture which records an instance of a practice, that is, instantiates it, is necessarily a good illustration of it, something that can't be said of many other kinds of records. And observe that pictures can be used not merely to provide instance-records of practices already known, but also to help us become aware of practices theretofore unidentified.

Now note that if one's interest is in the picturing of scenes as well as in the scenes that are pictured, then the difference between illustration and instantiation can become complicated. For any photograph which merely illustrates a behavioral practice must also provide not merely an instance-record of the illustrative practice, but an instance itself. And the same can be said when one passes beyond illustration itself to *symbolization*, namely, a referencing based on what may be a loose, uncodified connection between sign and meaning (or a fixed but thoroughly conventional one), and upon an evoked significance which may bear little relation to the facts. A creditably candid wedding picture of the groom placing a ring on the finger of the bride not only attests reliably to a wedding having taken place, but also supplies us with a special segment of the ceremony, one that has come to serve as a symbol of the whole, and behind this, as a symbol of the presumably loving relationship that was solemnized on the occasion. In fact,

<sup>27</sup>For example, tongue showing: Smith, Chase, and Lieblich (1974).

however, the pictured event itself does not provide us with evidence of the sequence of specific ritual details out of which the wedding in question was formulated, or evidence of the quality of the relationship thereby ratified. What can be instantiated in completed form (and what is therefore most suitable to pictorial research) involves lesser matters, such as the asymmetry of the traditional ring ritual, the general styling of wedding rings, and the choice of fingers thought proper for the placement of this piece of ceremonial jewelry. On the other hand, an "expressive" picture does provide an actual instance of the use in pictures of stereotyped symbolizations of wider social events and relationships.

The differences among illustrations, instance records, and symbolizations as here defined, complicate the analysis of pictures. A further bedevilment is the "photographic fallacy," namely, the very general tendency to confuse realness with representativeness and ideographic with nomothetic validity. A caught photograph of persons in action can provide all the evidence that one needs that a particular event—such as a wedding—very likely did occur. But that sufficiency is for those interested in the particulars of the past, in a word, biography. If instead one is interested in social routines, in customary behavioral patterns, then a wedding picture must differently figure; it can provide an instance record of, say, placement pattern with respect to the ring, but very little evidence concerning the social characteristics of the populations across which the practice is found and the range of contexts in which it occurs among these people—in fact, little evidence that one is dealing with a pattern at all. Yet when one establishes that a picture of something really is of the subject it portrays, it is very hard to avoid thinking that one has established something beyond this, namely, something about the event's currency, typicality, commonness, distribution, and so forth. The paradox is that "small behaviors" are what can be very fully instantiated by a single photograph, but one such picture can only establish the feasibility of actual occurrence. (The picture of Lee Harvey Oswald being shot provides excellent evidence of how a revolver was held on one occasion and, more important, Jack Ruby's guilt in this connection; but the picture provides little evidence of how hand guns are generally held for close range firing.) To which one must add that very often the sort of event whose *mere* occurrence—not *typicality* of occurrence—is of biographical or historic interest is one that cannot be photographed in the round throughout its course, but only in cross-section, as it were, this moment often providing very inadequate evidence of the occurrence and character of the event as a whole.

**VIII** Turn now to the question of carryover. Whether a pictured scene is caught, faked, or, in varying degrees realistically mocked-up, the model will bring elements of himself to it, affording to the viewers something of what he affords the eyes of actual participants in his real scenes. Just as a stage actor (but not an opera singer) can hardly perform a part in a language other than one in which he has a real competence, so models, professional or amateur, cannot transform themselves completely for a photographic appearance, at least if they are not to be encumbered with a

massive disguise. In theory at least, personal identity will be recoverable, oftentimes also the unique setting in which the photograph occurred (if not by us, then by modeling agencies, the police, kinsmen of the models, or whoever). However, if our interests are not ritualistic, as when we cherish a picture of Aunt Mabel because she herself can be identified in it, or legalistic, as when we establish that the person a certificate authorizes is the person who is presenting the authorization, or playful, as when we match early portraits against later ones, but rather academic, namely, to inquire into the way the world is, then identifiability as such ceases to be central.

Other matters will be more important. We are all in our society trained to employ a somewhat common idiom of posture, position, and glances, wordlessly choreographing ourselves relative to others in social situations with the effect that interpretability of scenes is possible. Some of this idiom we automatically continue to employ in composing and posing for scenes that are to be photographed—jumbled up, of course, with crude patches of gross symbolization for the camera.

But that is only the beginning, for however posed and “artificial” a picture is, it is likely to contain elements that record instances of real things. The scene pictured on the backdrop of a photographic portrait might be a painted fantasy, but the chair the subject sits on is real enough and speaks to a real genre of chairs, not pictures. (Students question the sense in which a chair can be said to be real, but *that* sort of doubt is not here at issue, for however that question is answered, the fact still remains that a picture of a chair is a radically different thing from a chair itself.) The clothes worn on the occasion are often Sunday best, sometimes causing the wearer to feel “unnatural,” but, of course, in all likelihood there will be real ceremonial occasions when the same garb will have been worn, the limiting case here being the wedding gown, since it may be worn and pictured on the same and (often) only occasion. The way a female model for a seated private portrait manages her legs can be a very studied effect helped along sometimes by the photographer, but what the two here strive for in this apparently artificial way can be exactly what she strives for when seated at a party facing viewers from the front; what one is learning about, then, is how she might choreograph herself for front views in general, not for camera views in particular. The same can be said for the Western male practice of covering the crotch when in a sitting position. The fact that male subjects from non-Western cultures tend not to exhibit this protectiveness in portraits is not a specific difference between their pictures and ours, merely an incidental one, being specific to the more general issue of behavior when exposed to direct view, and pertains to models, not merely subjects. When a movie starlet couple at a nightclub back bench suddenly adjust their faces into the stylized teeth grimace found mainly in photographs, doing this because a cameraman has come into sight, the free distance between their rumps can still reflect spacing practices in uncontrived scenes, not merely contrived ones—although admittedly in photographs indexed distances and especially depths are hard to measure. And by examining the spacing and body orientation of the two in regard to other subjects in the picture, we come to take it for granted,

probably quite correctly, that the two constitute a “with,” drawing here on precisely the same cues we would automatically employ when functioning as actual participants of live scenes.

**IX** Given that pictures may be organized as portraits or as scenes (and if the latter, caught, faked, or realistic to a degree), and given the distinction between illustration and instantiation, and the contrast of both of these to evocative symbolizations providing at best a purely conventional relation between vehicle and sign, and given further that one can be concerned about the nature of pictures as well as the nature of the world, it is possible to begin to see how heterogeneous a photograph may be as an object of academic interest.

One finds in pictures not only rules of scene production that are exclusive to pictures, but also photographic conventions peculiar to particular subject matters. For example, portrait photographers routinely touch up negatives or prints to improve the complexion of the subjects appearing in them, creating a people that has smoother skin than that found among mortals. In ads brunette women tend to be styled somewhat differently from blond women; this presumably a characteristic of pictures, not life.<sup>28</sup>

The settings in which members of a family snap one another are not fabricated for the purpose, are not merely props, but, as with the real settings used in home movies,<sup>29</sup> are hardly a haphazard selection from all the ones the family employs, and can only have the effect of producing a false general impression of its habitat. The expensive backdrops found in most commercial scenes *can* be found in the real world but only in very narrow circles. (Once rented or donated as background for a film or an advertisement, these environments can become merely another element of the world to which the viewer has pictorial access; they can become unrealistically familiar.) The females depicted in commercially posed scenes have straighter teeth and are slimmer, younger, taller, blonder, and “better” looking than those found in most real scenes, even most real scenes occurring in stylish settings, but certainly these figures are similar to the ones found in uncontrived, live scenes that occur in modeling agencies and other real places where mainly models foregather—which places, note, may not be luxuriously furnished. In contrast, the fact that women in American advertisements show no hair on their legs or under their arms can be taken to reflect directly the shaving

<sup>28</sup>Suggested in Millum (1975:142).

<sup>29</sup>See Chalfen (1975:96). Commercial movies can be shot in a studio containing hand-fashioned environments, or on an open studio lot, or in a geographical region that is similar in terrain to the real thing but closer to hand, or “on location” where the fictive events are purported to occur. But “real” in the last case must be used with care. Because mocked-up events are staged in these settings, often set in an epoch before or after the actual moviemaking, and because the ordinary traffic of people and events must be roped off during shooting, the realism provided by the setting can only serve to heighten the illusion, as when a con man manages to make use of a real banking office to hoodwink a mark. Reliance on such backdrops to establish life-likeness gives them a significance different from what they would ordinarily have, transforming them—as far as function is concerned—into quotations or symbols of themselves.

practice prevalent among women throughout America. (But the hairless legs and armpits displayed in French advertisements *cannot* similarly be taken as evidence of appearances beyond the camera, for in France, American depilatory practices so far have mostly influenced the commercially pictured world.) Finally, the general difference in hair styling, facial decoration, and clothing pattern that distinguishes male subjects from female subjects in American advertisements is by and large true of how males in all Westernized countries are distinguished from females both in posings for advertisements and in uncontrived scenes. To which must be added that what is common to commercial scenes and rare in life may yet be commonly part of the ideals and fantasies of many actual people.

In sum, between commercially posed scenes and live ones there is every kind of carryover and almost every kind of discrepancy. Nor are matters in any way fixed. As soon as a formulaic feature of commercially choreographed scenes is uncovered and publicized, advertisers are in a position to self-consciously initiate a sharply contrary policy or to present gayer versions of the old. Withal, the art of analysis is to begin with a batch of pictures and end up with suggestions of unanticipated features of uncontrived scenes, or with representations of themes that are hard to write about but easy to picture, or with illustrations of novel differences between pictures and life. And throughout, I believe, the issue of exploration should be kept separate temporally from the issue of proof. Arrangements which hold for many live scenes (or many pictured ones) lie ready to be uncovered in one example, but not direct evidence concerning their actual distribution.

**X** Finally, another look at the notion of a "scene," along with a review of the concept of commercial realism.

Consider first the organizational constraints all scenes in advertisements might share and presuppose, and the liberties that can (but aren't necessarily) taken in their assembly; in short, consider the realm of being of which the drama in every individual ad is but an instance.

It is easy to contrast what goes on in ads to what goes on in the real world and conclude—as commentators are wont—that advertisements present a dolled-up, affluent version of reality, but this does not tell us about the structure of advertising's world, that is, the way in which it is put together. So, too, it is easy to see commercial realism as constituting but another make-believe realm (along with the theater, cartoons, the novel, etc.) and to contrast all these merely fictive domains with reality; but however instructive, this comparison, I think, misses the point. For although such a contrast ought to be made, there is another that should proceed it. To explicate commercial realism one must start with the notion of "scene," *whether live or fictive*, and only after scenes have been contrasted to other ways of organizing understanding should, I think, one go on to contrast the commercially depicted variety in pictures to live, uncontrived ones.

The term "scene" is itself not a particularly happy one. An actual view, or a picture of a view, of something that is relatively unchanging—like a forest or a skyline—is called a scene, as is any background or backdrop, however bustling,

which a playwright or novelist might want to set as the general context of his action. A segment of an act in a stage play (something an act may have anywhere from one to ten of, each offering continuous action in one place) is also called a scene. A quarrel between related persons, conducted in a manner sensed to be open by onlookers to whom the disputants are less related, is also called a scene. And there is a current vernacular use, referring to something that an individual might make, dig, or dislike. The scenes this paper has been concerned with are of a different order.

In actual life as we wend our way through our day we pass into and out of immediate perception range of sequences of others; fleeting opportunity for viewing also occurs when they pass us. In metropolitan circumstances this means that we will be momentary onlookers of those whom we cannot identify biographically through name or appearance, that is, that we will catch glimpses of courses of action of strangers. Due to the warranted reputation of various behavioral settings and to the conventions of self-presentation, we will be able to infer something about the social identity (age, sex, race, class, etc.) of these strangers, their personal relationship to one another, their mood, and their current undertakings, these last, typically, only broadly categorized.

The totality of viewings of the courses of action of strangers which we obtain throughout our days constitutes our glimpsed world. This is not quite an impersonal world, especially for sophisticated viewers. But it is a truncated one, and one in which almost everything can be located in broad categories only. It is ordinarily bereft of details concerning the lives of those who are witnessed in passing and bereft of their longitudinal point of view regarding what they are seen as being and doing. (We strangers do not see John and Mary comparison shopping for a broach to replace the one that was lost last week at Jean's party, nor do we detect that their apparent dallying is due to their having to kill some time before going on to catch the new Fellini. That is what they see. We see a young middle-class couple looking at things in a jewelry store.) Observe, then, that to glimpse a world is not somehow to happen upon an intimate revealing drama that was not meant for us. Nor is it to obtain a somehow marred, distorted, fragmentary view of the whole, something that can be caused to snap back into its proper shape by the addition of new information or the exercise of interpretive skill. It is not as though we were cryptographers having to start with a partially deciphered text, able to take comfort in the prospect of eventual success in unlocking what has all along been there. Or cardiologists interpreting the sounds of a stethoscope for the character of a patient's disease. To glimpse a world rather is to employ a set of categories more or less distinctive to glimpsing and often entirely adequate for the job they are designed to do. Nor are these categories rough and undeveloped; indeed, the persons glimpsed are likely to be quite aware of precisely how they can be read, and will have as part of their concern to conform to anticipated displayings of themselves and to use these behavioral rubrics as a cover behind which to pursue all manner of unpublishable projects. Yet no amount of supplementary information of the kind we are likely to obtain is likely to bring us to the private view that the objects of our attention will themselves have of their own undertakings. To be sure, our passing views as strangers and

the sustained views of participants are not usually contradictory, and rough correspondences could be worked out, but inevitably our concerns and theirs will be considerably different, as to a degree will be the world their conventional public behavior generates for us and the world they are in while moving from point to point under these ensigns.

Now although there are real individuals whose glimpsed world is almost their only one, most of us live, and principally, in other worlds, ones having a longitudinal character, featuring extended courses of interlinked action and unique relationships to other people. Observe that a stage play or even a comic strip provides us with something quite beyond a glimpse of the lives (albeit fictional lives) of its characters; for we are given considerable personal information about the protagonists and can link together various glimpsings of them, in consequence of which we can enter into their courses of action in more detail and with much more temporal depth than is ordinarily possible in the case of our real passing views of the lives of strangers.

Commercial realism (along with certain cartoons and other drawings) provides, then, something of the same sort of realm as the one a stranger to everyone around him really lives in. The realm is full of meaningful viewings of others, but each view is truncated and abstract in the ways mentioned.

And now having noted the significant similarity between live scenes and the ones pictured in advertisements, one can go on to properly locate the consideration already given of differences. To repeat: glimpses of real life (like caught photographs of it) provide us with models who are portraying themselves, whereas commercial realism does not—cartoons and other drawings may not even employ models. Yet there are ways in which commercial realism provides us something that is fuller and richer than real glimpses. First, ads (along with cartoons and other one-shot drawings) are intentionally choreographed to be unambiguous about matters that uncontrived scenes might well be uninforming about to strangers. Second, scenes contrived for photographing (just as the ones drawn in comics) can be shot from any angle that the cameraman chooses, the subjects themselves splayed out to allow an unobstructed view; these are two liberties that a person viewing a live scene cannot take. Finally, short of engaging in voyeuristic activity, a real person is very considerably restricted as to the sorts of live scenes he will be allowed to glimpse from whatever angle, for his presence in a place always requires social warrant. In advertised worlds, however, we can look in on almost everything. Observe that these dramaturgic advantages of

commercial realism over real life, other fictional realms have also, along with some advantages that commercial realism lacks.

A closing comment. The magical ability of the advertiser to use a few models and props to evoke a life-like scene of his own choosing is not primarily due to the art and technology of commercial photography; it is due primarily to those institutionalized arrangements in social life which allow strangers to glimpse the lives of persons they pass, and to the readiness of all of us to switch at any moment from dealing with the real world to participating in make-believe ones.

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